



FSIS SUPERVISORY SUMMARIES

A series of “on target” supervisory selection guidance

TOPIC #3: PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW AND WRITING BEI QUESTIONS

Question: When structuring the interview, is it a good idea to explain the job up front or after all the interview questions have been asked?

- To ensure you have sufficient time to obtain all the information you need from the applicant, it is recommended that you talk about the job and answer applicant questions *at the end of the interview*.

Question: What is the best way to open the interview? Should I prepare something in advance or just “talk off the cuff”.

- At the beginning of the interview, you want to prepare a “structuring statement” which lays out the process to the applicant and tells them what they can expect. Some of the points you will want to cover could be done in the following manner:
 - ✓ I will be asking you about your previous work (or school, if applicable) experiences.
 - ✓ Some of the questions will require you to describe specific situations you have encountered. When we get to these questions it may take you a few moments to think of a specific situation.
 - ✓ I will be taking notes.
 - ✓ Because our time is limited, I may occasionally ask you to move along more quickly.
 - ✓ Near the end of the interview I will tell you more about the (Division, Branch , etc) and the job.
 - ✓ There will be time at the end of the interview for me to answer your questions.

You want to create a relaxed environment for the applicant by keeping things conversational. Therefore, while you don't need to read the above verbatim, you should always prepare some notes ahead to ensure you cover pertinent details of the process.

Question: Can I write my own BEI questions or do I have to use the questions provided in the interview kit?

- Yes, you can write your own questions if the questions in the interview kit do not adequately address what you are looking for. However, be sure that your questions are asking for examples of real work experiences tied to a particular competency and not hypothetical situations. BEI questions elicit the situation and use probes to identify the specific behaviors and the outcome. Look for “worst, least, best, most recent” examples of what the interviewee has done. They should begin with something like, “give me an example of the (best or worst or last or most recent) time you...” All questions should include probes to address the situation, behaviors and the outcome. The probes should seek accomplishments to include successes as well as difficulties.

Question: When writing a BEI question, should I outline the competency I am evaluating and how the competency is used before asking the question? For example, if I was asking a question about analytical ability, should I say something like, “This job requires analytical ability in order to evaluate large amounts of information, sort relevant and irrelevant information, etc. Give me an example of a time that you evaluated large amounts of information, sorted relevant and irrelevant information, etc?”

- No. A recent workshop with PDI (our interview contractor) indicated that it is best not to preface each question with an explanation of the competency and how it is used. The reason that the question should not include this information is because the question then becomes too leading and lets the applicant know how the question should be answered. If you wish to give an explanation of the competencies, it is recommended that it be done at end of the interview when you provide more details about the job.

Question: Should I give out the questions ahead of time?

- No, it is not recommended. According to industrial psychologists, giving out the questions ahead of time will change what you are evaluating and invalidate the rating criteria. You will no longer be measuring the competency but rather will be measuring how well they have prepared. It also promotes canned responses, typical of traditional interviews, which over time can be embellished and “doctored up”.

Question: During an interview, after asking the question, should I also read all the probes at the same time, too?

- No, the interview should *not* be an interrogation. You don't want the applicant to be intimidated. Instead, read the initial question, but then keep it conversational. Ask probes as the applicant speaks to guide them towards explaining the situation, their behavior or actions and the outcome.

Question: What percent of the questions asked should focus on negative situations, to include those questions which ask for worst, least, biggest mistake, etc.

- While these questions provide excellent insights into behaviors, it is recommended that no more than 40 percent of the questions are negative.

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